

## Lawmakers seek to limit off-reservation Indian casinos

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

4:56 p.m. March 8, 2006

WASHINGTON – Reacting to backlash against Indian gambling's most controversial trend, key lawmakers are seeking to limit Indian tribes' ability to establish casinos away from their reservations.

Bills by House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo, R-Calif., and Senate Indian Affairs Committee Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz., would eliminate an exception in existing law that allows tribes with reservations to build casinos in other locations, even in other states.

Their bills would also tighten up the circumstances under which tribes that have been newly recognized by the federal government, or that don't have reservation land of their own, could get permission to build casinos.

“What I'm attempting to do is deal with a problem that we have with Indian gaming expanding into areas that no one imagined it would expand into to the degree that it has,” Pombo said.

The vast majority of the nation's 400-plus tribal casinos, which took in \$18.5 billion in 2004, were built on existing reservation land. As Indian gambling boomed, tribes began looking beyond their borders for better locations.

The 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act allows off-reservation gambling only under a narrow set of exceptions. Tribes are increasingly pursuing alternatives such as getting Congress to grant them federal trust land where gambling is permitted.

So far, about 30 tribes have succeeded, the Interior Department says.

Bills by Pombo and McCain would eliminate off-reservation gambling for tribes with their own reservation land. Landless or newly recognized tribes would be able to build casinos only on land to which they have historical, geographical and other ties.

Under Pombo's proposal, tribes could invite other tribes to build casinos on their reservation land and share profits. He also suggests additional steps that landless or newly recognized tribes would have to take, such as stronger input from the local community.

Some tribes trying to build off-reservation criticized the proposals, saying they erect needless barriers to Indian economic development.

“For a lot of tribes (off-reservation gambling) creates an economic opportunity that's not there for us right now,” said James W. Ransom, chief of New York's St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, which is trying for a Catskills casino.

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